

## JCW Open Day

Monday, 11 March 2013

On Sunday, February 3, we, the women of Jerusalem Center for Women, invited East Jerusalemite women to our Open Day. Around 50 women – mainly from our legal clinics groups – followed our invite to Ras al-Amoud. The theme and what we were up to discuss with the women was: 'the obedient house'.

“ What does it mean, the 'obedient house', and how does it affect women ?

We had invited a lawyer who is particularly qualified in Sharia' Law to elaborate on this practice.

'The obedient house' means that a woman, who left her husband, can be forced back to him, against her will, by the court, by the police force; it has been exercised as a kind of revenge by the husband.

The lawyer said, "'The obedient house' is rather a 'humiliating house' for women".

The obvious feature of a patriarchal society is the male dominance over women, executed by husbands, brothers, sons even; it is an endless circle of women's subjugation.

Before Islam, the lawyer explained, women were objectified, were granted no rights at all, and others decided for them as they would please.

It was the first time with the introduction of Islam, she said, when women have been granted their rights, such as the right to negotiate the marriage contract, the right to inheritance, to property, to choose a husband. In Islam, as in the Qur'an, Sunnah, Hadith, there is no such thing as the 'obedient house'.

The 'obedient house' is a mislead interpretation, a (literally) man-made construct, by figures who studied the scriptures, and how they wanted to see and explain them, as the scriptures suit them, men, best.

Yet, in the verses, the Prophet talks about women and men as equals. The Qur'an speaks about a 'marriage contract' which is characterized by love, compassion, respect.

Yet, in the patriarchal reality, the construct of the 'obedient house' is still a common practice, a custom.

“ Where did it come from in the first place, was a question raised.

It came from the French Law, the lawyer elaborated; as the majority of the Arab countries were colonized by the French, the occupiers implemented their legal systems and practices.

Today (actually since the 1980s), thanks to the women's movement, the practice of the 'obedient house' is not anymore executed by the police forcing women back to their husbands; today, husbands perform their 'right' in denying their wives (and children) any financial support, when they left.

Notably, nobody ever asks WHY a woman leaves her husband –

Women's groups and human rights groups have been active addressing the Islamic Court to erase this custom, along with advocating for respecting women's rights in general.

This year's Open Day concluded after a lively discussion following the lecture, where women shared their thoughts, experiences, stories, and where they gave feedback and encouragement to each other to be strong and steadfast as we still have a long way to go to enjoy equal rights, freedom and justice.